

MY SECRET MISSION.

A Memorable Visit to South Carolina in March, 1861.

MR. LINCOLN'S INSTRUCTIONS

Interviews With Governor Pickens and Major Anderson.

AN UNSUCCESSFUL EFFORT.

Threatened With Mob Violence and Saved by Lawrence Keitt.

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In the latter days of March, 1861, I was sent by Mr. Lincoln on a confidential mission to Charleston, S. C. It was in its nature one of great delicacy and importance, and the state of the public mind in the South at that juncture made it no altogether free from danger of life and limb, as I was rather roughly reminded before the adventure was concluded. Throughout the whole land was heard the tumult of mad contention; the representatives, men, the politicians and the press of the two sections were hurling at each other deadly threats and fierce defiance; sober and thoughtful men heard with sickening alarm the deep and not distant mutterings of the coming storm; and all minds were agitated by gloomy forebodings, distressing doubts, and exasperating uncertainty as to what the next move in the strife should be.

As South Carolina had been the first to make an experimental test in the matter of nullifying Federal laws, so she was the first to proclaim herself a free and independent nation. As early as the 6th of November, 1860, the Legislature of that State had taken the initial step in that wild way, on assembling, to choose Presidential electors, who voted for Breckinridge and Lane. On the 20th of December, General William H. Glaz had recommended in his message that, in the event of the election of Abraham Lincoln, a convention of the people should be called to consider and determine "the mode and measure of redress" for a catalogue of grievances which he enumerated. He then formulated the future policy of the State by declaring that, on the happening of the contingency named, the alternative would be "the secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union."

Following the lead of South Carolina, the secession element of other Southern States had cut them loose, one by one, from their Federal bonds, and "The Confederate States of America" was the result. It was at the virtual Capital of the State which had been the pioneer. In all this haughty and stupendous work of rebellion that I was called to trust my precious limbs as a strangle within her gates and an enemy to her cause.

MR. LINCOLN'S POLICY.

Up to this time Mr. Lincoln had been slow to realize, or to acknowledge, even to himself, the awful gravity of the situation, and the danger that the gathering clouds portended. Certainly it is that Mr. Seward widely underrated the courage and determination of the Southern people, and both indulged the hope that pacific means might yet be employed to arrest the tide of passion and rending, to forestall the necessary war. Mr. Seward was believed, as the world knows, to credit the Southern leaders with a lavish supply of noisy bravado, quite overlooking the dogged pertinacity and courage which Mr. Lincoln well knew would characterize those men, as well as the Southern masses, in case of armed conflict with the sections. Mr. Lincoln was a man of his word, and he knew well the character of that people. He believed it possible to effect some accommodation by dealing directly with the most chivalrous among their leaders; and, at all events he thought it his duty to try, and my embassy to Charleston was one of his experiments in that direction.

A DELICATE AND DANGEROUS MISSION.

During the last months of Buchanan's administration, owing to Mr. Seward's fame and prominence, it was naturally supposed that he would be Mr. Lincoln's most trusted adviser; and, in fact, the opinion prevailed that Seward would be President and Lincoln a mere figure-head. I was involved in the Southern states, and Mr. Seward, before and after Mr. Lincoln's inauguration, that no attempt would be made to reinforce the Southern forts, or to reoccupy Fort Sumter under a Republican administration. This made matters embarrassing, as Mr. Lincoln's administration had on the contrary adopted the policy of maintaining the Southern authority at all points, and of tolerating no interference in the enforcement of that authority from any source whatever.

When my mission was suggested by Mr. Lincoln, Mr. Seward promptly opposed it. "Mr. President," said he, "greatly fear you will be compelled to do it. I fear they may kill him in Charleston. Those people are greatly excited and are very desperate. We can't spare Lamon, and we shall feel very badly if anything happens to him."

"My Secretary," said Mr. Lincoln, "I have known Lamon to be in many a close place, and he has never been in one that he didn't get out of. By Jig! I'll risk him, Go, Lamon, and God bless you. Bring back a palmetto if you can't bring us good news."

ARRIVAL IN CHARLESTON.

March 25, 1861.

Mr. Lamon, from the President of the United States, requests to be allowed to visit Fort Sumter on business entirely pacific, and my Col. Duran, will go with him and every effort will be made to see every request is observed toward Mr. Lamon.

W. H. LAMON, Governor.

At 8 o'clock that morning I started from Washington to New York, and arrived at noon. I took a steamer to Boston, and thence a train to Providence, where I found Mr. Glaz, who had been sent to me by Mr. Lincoln, to act as my guide and companion. We took a boat to New Bedford, and thence a train to New Haven, where we got on a steamer for New York.

On the 27th we took a train to Albany, and thence a steamer to Troy, where we got on a train for Albany, and thence a steamer to New York.

On the 29th we took a train to Albany, and thence a steamer to Troy, where we got on a train for Albany, and thence a steamer to New York.

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On the 31st we took a train to Albany, and thence a steamer to Troy, where we got on a train for Albany, and thence a steamer to New York.

On the 1st of April we took a train to Albany, and thence a steamer to Troy, where we got on a train for Albany, and thence a steamer to New York.

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